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PAUL'S OPPONENTS IN GALATIA

I

Modern Pauline studies began with the Tübingen scholar, F. C. Baur.¹ In 1831 he published his 'Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom.'² in which he first articulated his thesis that primitive Christianity was characterized by a conflict between Petrine and Pauline factions. Starting from 1 Cor. 1: 11–12, which delineates parties of those who followed Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ, he argued that in reality there were only two parties, that of Peter which included the party of Christ and that of Paul which included the party of Apollos. The former group was the Jewish Christian Church which differed from Judaism proper mainly in that it accepted Jesus as the Messiah. It was this group that founded the church in Rome, opposed Paul at Corinth and Galatia, later came to be known as the Ebionites and was considered heretical by the church writers of the post-apostolic period. An important witness to Petrine Christianity, according to Baur, is the Pseudo-Clementine writings which record a struggle between Peter and Paul, who in these writings is camouflaged as Simon Magus.³

Baur's thoughts on Paul came to full fruition in 1845 when he published his now famous *Paulus*.⁴ Using tendency criticism (i.e. criticism which noted the tendency in some documents to eliminate or play down the faction between Petrine and Pauline Christianity and thus to reflect the spirit of a later period), he acknowledged only Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians as genuine Pauline letters. In these he could see most clearly the conflict between the Petrine and Pauline factions. The other Pauline letters were written later when an attempt was being made to conciliate the two groups. The Acts of the Apostles was dismissed as historically unreliable in that it was an attempt by a Paulinist to bring about a rapprochement between the opposing groups by representing Paul as Petrine as possible and Peter as Pauline as possible.

In regard to Galatians Baur contended that the Apostolic Council, recorded in Gal. 2, had to do not merely with the opposition of the false

brethren but with the Jerusalem apostles. ‘The course of the transactions shows in what relation the Apostles stood with regard to the principles of these false brethren. They are themselves the opponents against whom the Apostle contends in refuting these principles.’⁵ But the apostles were unable to withstand the power of Paul’s defense and reasoning and acknowledged his independence, although full reconciliation did not ensue. An agreement was reached that Paul would go to the Gentiles and the Jerusalem apostles would go to the Jews; but this was merely a concession on the part of the latter not to oppose Paul. They themselves, while passive toward Paul’s mission, remained in close connection with the zealous members of the Jewish Christian community who were consistent in their teaching that the law was necessary for salvation. Paul’s opponents reflected in his letter to the Galatians, according to Baur, were these zealous Jewish Christians who, unopposed by the Jerusalem apostles, infiltrated his churches in order to complete the work of conversion by imposing on the Gentiles the requirements of the law.

By the end of the nineteenth century Baur had lost most of his followers.⁶ Nevertheless, today the position which Baur articulated continues to play an important role in Pauline studies in general and Galatian studies in particular. Primarily it provides a base for modification or rejection. In the following pages we will attempt to give a representative (though not complete) survey of research in Galatians since the time of Baur⁷ dividing the works into (1) those which view the opponents as Jewish Christian judaizers from Jerusalem and (2) those which do not. We will then set forth our own position, which is that the opponents were Jewish Christian judaizers supported by the apostles at Jerusalem. Our position differs from that of Baur in that, unlike Baur, it contends that the judaizers believed that Paul, like them, taught the necessity of circumcision and the law for salvation and were totally unaware of his non-circumcision gospel. This, as we will show in Chapter 2, is because Paul had just recently told the apostles of his revelation of a non-circumcision gospel to the Gentiles, and an insufficient time had elapsed for them to make the Jewish church aware of this new development in the Gentile mission.

The Galatian opponents: Jewish Christian judaizers from Jerusalem

In 1865 J. B. Lightfoot produced a commentary on Galatians in which he attempted to expose the fallacy of Baur’s thesis.⁸ He rejected Baur’s contention that Acts was written in order to smooth over difficulties between Peter and Paul. He offered lengthy discussions showing how Acts and the autobiographical sections of Galatians harmonize. Moreover, he denied the Pseudo-Clementine writings as representing the true picture of the relation-

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ship between the two apostles. Rather its author used Peter as a mouthpiece for his own views. Likewise much of the post-apostolic literature about James and the Jewish church reflected a confused picture of the true situation.

As for Paul's relationship with the three, it was one of complete mutual recognition. The opponents of Paul in Galatia were Jewish judaizers probably from Jerusalem who may even have been followers of Christ himself. But they were not supported by the apostles. If the apostles were slow in checking the judaizers it was probably because they had hopes of conciliating them. As for James, Lightfoot conceded that he may have been in a slightly different situation from Peter, John, and Paul. These were required to become all things to all men, but James, as the local leader of the Jerusalem church, was required only to be a Jew to the Jews.

But on the least favourable supposition it amounts to this, that St James, though he had sanctioned this emancipation of the Gentiles from the law, was not prepared to welcome them as Israelites and admit them as such to full communion: that in fact he had not yet overcome scruples which even St Peter had only relinquished after many years and by a special revelation; in this, as in his recognition of Jesus as the Christ, moving more slowly than the Twelve.⁹

In 1959 H. J. Schoeps¹⁰ argued, against Baur and the Tübingen school, that there was no great gulf between Paul and the 'pillar' apostles. He rejected the late Pseudo-Clementine writings as being biased and unhistorical (though earlier he had considered them of more value). He saw the Galatian crisis in light of three positions: (1) Paul's, (2) Peter's and James', and (3) the judaizing extremists'. Schoeps argued that while we cannot take the account of Acts wholesale, since it dilutes the problems between Peter, James, and Paul, it is still clear that the former two took a moderate position at the Jerusalem Conference. Though at heart they may have inclined toward the more Jewish position, they made concessions to the Gentile mission and came to a mutual agreement with Paul.

As for the Galatian crisis itself the Jerusalem extremist group had infiltrated Paul's churches and taught that circumcision and the law were necessary for salvation. Their converts, 'those who accept circumcision' (Gal. 6: 13), had fanned the flames of Judaism and had caused great concern to Paul. But in no way were the 'pillar' apostles themselves instigators of this disturbance, nor were the judaizing extremists in any way their messengers. Schoeps says:

The Tübingen conception of a deep gulf between Paul, on the one

hand, and James and Peter, on the other, which Baur, Schwegler, Volckmar, Hilgenfeld and their followers conjured up on the basis of the biased Jewish-Christian writings of the next generation, does not stand the test of impartial examination, and cannot possibly have reflected the real historical situation. Such a gulf is true only of the Pharisaic group of Judaizing Christians who were probably strongly represented in Jerusalem.¹¹

Recently, Robert Jewett offered an explanation of the opponents in Galatia on the basis of an historical situation which had arisen in Judea.¹² The situation was the Zealot movement in the period leading up to the Roman war but especially during the procuratorship of Ventidius Cumanus (A.D. 48–52). During this time the Zealots sought to cleanse the Land of Israel of all Gentile elements in the hope that God would usher in the kingdom. They believed that God's wrath would be upon them until absolute separation from the heathen world took place. Zealot attention thus was directed against Gentile sympathizers like Paul (Acts 23: 12–22, 20: 3) and against all those connected with them (therefore a possible explanation for the persecution mentioned in 1 Thess. 2: 14–16). Jewett says:

My hypothesis therefore is that Jewish Christians in Judea were stimulated by Zealotic pressure into a nomistic campaign among their fellow Christians in the late forties and early fifties. Their goal was to avert the suspicion that they were in communion with lawless Gentiles. It appears that the Judean Christians convinced themselves that circumcision of Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals.¹³

It was about this time that agitators first appeared at Antioch (Acts 15: 1–5) and sometime later at Galatia.

According to Jewett, the strategy of the judaizers was not to oppose Paul or his theology directly but to offer a perfection of it. 'The promise of perfection would have a powerful appeal to the Hellenistic Christians of Galatia, for such was the aim of the mystery religions as well as of classical philosophy.'¹⁴ Circumcision and the cultic calendar as a means to this perfection would be most intriguing to the Galatians. But so as not to weaken their case the agitators did not mention that they were obliged to keep the whole law. Meanwhile the Galatians, with their pagan background, were as susceptible to libertinism as to Judaism. Consequently, since they believed that the Spirit gave them immediate immortality, they showed little interest in ethical distinctions.

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The Galatian opponents: other than Jewish Christian judaizers from Jerusalem

In 1929 James Hardy Ropes published a monograph entitled *The Singular Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians*, which was a theory about the Galatian opponents based on an earlier work by Wilhelm Lütgert.¹⁶ Ropes rejected the common view that the opponents were Jewish judaizers on the basis of Paul's arguments. He noted that though Paul argued for the futility of the law, he wished to retain contact with the Hebrew tradition as being essential to the gospel of Christ, a position which apparently did not belong to the opponents. He noted that the common view had the opponents appeal to the authority of the Jerusalem apostles against Paul and at the same time accuse him of being dependent on the Jerusalem apostles. He also argued that the common view did not fit in with the ethical section of the epistle which seemed to be 'a straightforward warning against lax tendencies, addressed to persons who really needed it'.¹⁷ Ropes doubted that such a warning would have been addressed to judaizers who were trying to force people to keep the law.

Consequently, Ropes, following Lütgert, suggested as an alternate theory that the opponents actually belonged to two groups, each of which emphasized one side of Paul's teaching. One was a Gentile judaizing group which exaggerated the Hebraic element in Paul's doctrine and taught that the law was necessary to salvation. The other was a group of spiritual radicals or 'pneumatics' who, in reaction to the first group, exaggerated the concept of 'freedom'. This group was opposed to Paul's notion of the basic relationship between the Hebrew historical and moral tradition and the Christian faith. They disparaged Paul personally and charged him with holding a subordinate position in subjection to the Jerusalem apostles to whom they themselves held no allegiance. They also accused him of adapting his gospel to the needs of his environment, of having left his doctrine of freedom from the law, and of practically having preached circumcision itself. Thus while Paul's affirmation that justification comes by faith apart from the works of the law was directed against the judaizing group, his emphasis on the value of the Hebrew tradition plus many affirmations throughout the epistle were directed against the radical group.

In 1945 Frederic R. Crownfield rejected the Lütgert-Ropes position that Galatians was directed against two groups on the grounds that the epistle did not give the slightest indication of a two-fold opposition.¹⁸ He proposed that the opponents were syncretists, who had possibly been members of a Jewish mystery cult, who sought union with deity in various ways, including circumcision. The resultant effect of their syncretism was

‘the combination of some Jewish rites with laxity in morals’.¹⁹ As to the interrelationship between the various parties, Crownfield suggested that Paul was allied with Jerusalem against the syncretists.

An explosive situation arose in Galatia when the syncretists came through and taught that a higher spiritual illumination could be reached through circumcision and possibly other rites and that Paul himself believed this but had avoided telling them of it because of his subservience to the conservative Jewish apostles. They further emphasized the divine nature of the law of Moses but held that its strict morality was dull and uninspiring. The Mosaic rites, they said, had meaning only as vehicles of hidden power. Paul, in his response to such syncretism, emphasized (1) his independence from the Jerusalem apostles, (2) the mutual exclusiveness of law and gospel, and (3) the moral imperative of Christian liberty.

In 1954 Johannes Munck²⁰ levied a broadside attack on Baur and the Tübingen school. Munck argued that the view that the gospel was for everyone including Gentiles was held by the Jewish church and Paul alike and that the difference between them was one of method not message. The Jewish church believed that the Gentiles would be converted when Israel came to faith; Paul believed that Israel would be converted when the Gentiles came to faith.²¹

According to Munck, Paul’s opponents in Galatia were not Jewish judaizers but Gentile judaizers who had misunderstood Paul’s teaching about Jerusalem and who were influenced by reading the Old Testament. Munck drew attention to the present participle, ‘those who accept circumcision’ (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι), in Gal. 6: 13 and argued that it had to refer to those who were receiving circumcision, namely, Gentiles. Munck says:

As the present participle in the middle voice of *περιτέμνω* never means ‘those who belong to the circumcision’, but everywhere else ‘those who receive circumcision’, that must also be the case in Gal. 6: 13. That is made specially clear by the connexion between the two sentences. The thought here is not of the Jews or Judaizers in general, but specifically of the Judaizers among the Galatians. Paul’s opponents who are agitating for Judaism among the Gentile Christian Galatians, are therefore themselves Gentile Christians. Their circumcision is still in the present, so that all this Judaizing movement is of recent date.²²

In 1956 Walter Schmithals published an article entitled ‘Die Häretiker in Galatien’²³ which he reissued in a revised version in *Paulus und die Gnostiker* in 1965²⁴ in which he argued against Lütgert and Ropes for a single battle line of opposition in Galatia. The opponents were Jewish or

Jewish Christian gnostics, who though they preached circumcision, had no connection with the Jerusalem apostles. Schmithals argued that the premise of the opponents, accepted also by Paul, was that 'purity of the gospel and the non-mediated character of the apostolate are inseparable'.²⁵ This gnostic belief was far from the position of the Jerusalem apostles. Furthermore, he argued that their non-connection with Jerusalem was clear in that they charged Paul with being dependent on the Jewish apostles. For them to make this charge while they themselves were dependent on the apostles would be to deny their own source of authority. He denied the argument that the opponents denounced Paul for not having lived up to the gospel as he received it from Jerusalem, an argument which, according to Schmithals, was merely a way out of an exegetical predicament, for to him 'the charge actually concerns dependence and not a single word concerns *apostasy*'.²⁶

II

A common method used by all those who attempt to identify the opponents at Galatia is to analyze the charges against Paul and his responses to them. He is said to have been charged with being a non-genuine apostle, of dependence on man for his gospel, of apostasy, of time serving and changing his tone, of having dishonorably tried to please men, of abridging his message, and of preaching circumcision. Though some think the opponents were subtle in their approach, many believe that they openly brought hostile accusations against the apostle. Thus Baur says that the opponents used 'the most unjust accusations and the most malicious calumnies against the Apostle Paul'.²⁷ Ropes says the charges amounted to a 'personal attack upon Paul which he bitterly resents and to which he here replies in a good deal of heat'.²⁸ Schoeps says the opponents make an *ad hominem* attack on Paul.²⁹ Whether the charges were subtle or open most believe that the opponents can be identified by the implications of these charges against Paul.³⁰

But an examination of the charges shows that there is no consensus of opinion as to what they actually imply. For example, one charge which most believe was made against Paul is that he is dependent on the Jerusalem apostles for his gospel. But this charge has received more than one interpretation. Ropes uses it to prove that the opponents in this case cannot have been Jewish Christian judaizers from Jerusalem for this would put the judaizers in a position of opposing Paul for being dependent on the Jerusalem apostles and drawing authority from them when that was the source of their own authority.³¹ Similarly Schmithals argues that

it is inconceivable that the Jerusalem apostles in Galatia accuse Paul of being dependent *upon themselves* or, in case they were only representatives of the Jerusalem authorities that *like themselves* he

is dependent upon the apostles in Jerusalem. Therewith one can indeed minimize his authority as an apostle, but certainly cannot reject his gospel.³²

But on the basis of this charge others argue that the opponents are Jewish judaizers connected with Jerusalem. To them the charge is not simply that Paul is dependent on the Jerusalem apostles, but that being dependent on them he has not remained loyal to them. Thus Bligh says: 'The whole charge was that having received the gospel from the apostles in Jerusalem, he was not teaching what the apostles taught by diluting the gospel to please the Gentiles (cf. Gal. 1: 10).'³³ According to Bligh there is no implication whatever in this charge that the opponents are non-Jewish judaizers.

Another case where unanimity fails over the interpretation of a charge is the so-called charge of pleasing men implied from Gal. 1: 10. Ropes says that the charge is supplemented and probably explained by another charge implied in Gal. 5: 11 that Paul preached circumcision. In combination, the two mean that Paul is charged with preaching circumcision in order to please the Jerusalem apostles. Ropes says that this rules out the identification of the opponents as judaizers since

this is a most extraordinary charge for judaizers to bring, whose own chief business at the moment was itself to 'preach circumcision'. We could understand such an allegation by them if they had claimed Paul as an ally, but Paul here evidently treats the statement as a hostile charge, to be repudiated with indignation.³⁴

But completely to the contrary is the view of Munck. To him the charge is that Paul has sought to please the Galatians, not the Jerusalem apostles, by abridging the message which he got from Jerusalem.³⁵ This means that the opponents are judaizers though Munck claims that they are Gentile by race.³⁶

From these examples it appears that the charge approach to the identification of the opponents causes diversity in interpretation. This is because the charges themselves are not clearly stated in the letter and come only as implications from some very brief and unclear statements. This leads us to question whether any direct charges were in fact made at all. As Jewett conjectured, it was not the strategy of the opponents to oppose Paul directly but to offer a completion to his gospel.³⁷ Thus it is possible that the opponents did not charge Paul outright but in a very clever way undermined his authority indirectly. Moreover, it is possible even to go further and argue that the opponents did not charge Paul at all, directly or

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indirectly, but actually considered him to teach circumcision as they themselves did and in fact treated him as an ally.

A close look at the so-called charges shows that there is good reason to argue for this last proposal because it is not really clear that actual charges were brought against Paul. Many of the statements which are supposed to have been made against Paul do not convey within themselves hostile notions, but can be understood as complimentary. Thus when it is said that Paul is dependent on the Jerusalem apostles, there is no indication that this is a disparagement of Paul's authority, as if to say dependence on the apostles is bad. Many no doubt considered it proper and honorable to be dependent upon them. Moreover, when it is said that Paul still preaches circumcision there is no indication that this is spoken in disapproval of Paul, especially since the opponents themselves preached circumcision. And when it is said that Paul pleases men, there is no indication that this is considered inherently bad. Paul himself recognizes the need for expedient action when it is done for the right cause and at times speaks in favor of it (Gal. 4: 18; 1 Cor. 9: 19–23). It is very possible that Paul denied these assertions, not because they in themselves were bad or that they were maliciously directed against him, but because in his mind (and perhaps in his mind only) they were damaging to his unique position in the church which was not fully known by the opponents. In his particular case only must it not be said that he is dependent on the apostles and preaches circumcision because he, as the apostle to the Gentiles, had received a direct revelation to preach a non-circumcision gospel. Thus while he rejects the affirmations of the agitators, there is no indication that the agitators themselves knew of his unique position in the church or that they directly or indirectly intended to undermine his authority. One can argue that the agitators not only preached a Jewish gospel but actually used the example of Paul to support their views.

Consequently, it is possible that a different approach to identifying the agitators should be made. The view presented here is that rather than assuming that the opponents held the opposite position from the one they ascribed to Paul, they held in fact the same position they ascribed to him and considered him as their ally. If this is true it is most likely that the agitators were Jewish Christian judaizers from Jerusalem³⁸ who preached circumcision and who said that Paul did the same because he like them was dependent on the Jerusalem apostles for his gospel.

It is noteworthy that this understanding of the opponents fits well with the details of the letter. The following scenario is a reconstruction of events, from this point of view, which led up to Paul's writing of Galatians.

First of all when Paul came to Galatia he came because of a weakness of

the flesh (Gal. 4: 13) which was apparently a disease.³⁹ After he left, Jewish Christians passed through and were surprised to find the Galatians uncircumcised. When they explained to the Gentiles that their salvation would not be complete (Gal. 3: 3) until they accepted the law and had submitted to circumcision, the Galatians responded by explaining that Paul had said nothing about these matters. After the judaizers learned of the circumstances surrounding Paul's visit among them they surmised that Paul had held back his usual insistence on circumcision because of his illness. He was afraid that the Galatians would reject him personally (Gal. 4: 14) because of the disease and would not accept a circumcision gospel. Paul, consequently, had avoided mentioning circumcision at that time in order that he might first win their confidence (Gal. 1: 10); but he certainly intended to return later and complete the process. They assured the Galatians that this was the case since Paul, like them, had been commissioned by the Jerusalem apostles who likewise taught circumcision. There could be no doubt that a man of Paul's integrity and loyalty to the church taught circumcision (Gal. 5: 11). In fact his reputation with all the churches in Judea (Gal. 1: 22–24) made it inconceivable that Paul under normal conditions failed to teach the necessity of the law for salvation.

When Paul heard of the disturbance the judaizers had caused in Galatia by this reasoning he was pained (Gal. 4: 19). He had been led to believe from his Jerusalem meeting with the 'pillars' (Gal. 2: 1–10) that the matter of circumcision had been resolved as well as his conflict with judaizers and that he would have a free rein to preach the non-circumcision gospel to Gentiles. But now again here were Jerusalem teachers troubling (Gal. 1: 7) his converts over the matter of circumcision. And what was even worse, they were putting the words of their circumcision gospel into his mouth. In his letter he thus denies his dependence on the Jerusalem apostles and the assertion that he preaches circumcision. Whatever else the Galatians think they must not think that he preaches a circumcision gospel. Paul reaffirms what he had preached the first time by pronouncing anathema (Gal. 1: 8–9) on anyone, man or angel, who should preach anything other than precisely what he had preached in Galatia. Since the agitators had taken it upon themselves to speak for Paul, he emphasizes that the present letter is by him only, Paul in the flesh (Gal. 5: 2), and not by some would-be spokesman for him. At the conclusion he draws attention to his large writing (Gal. 6: 11), again emphasizing that he, Paul, and no one else is speaking.

As for the opponents' interpretation of his visit to Galatia, Paul could not have been more in disagreement. He did not dilute the gospel in order to please them and win their confidence. This did not correspond to the